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Who Was Joseph's Father in Jesus' Genealogy?

Eric Lyons, M.Min



IN his book *The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy*, skeptic Dennis McKinsey confidently asserts that the “contradictory” genealogies found in Matthew 1 and Luke 3 open up “a Pandora’s box that apologists would just as soon remained closed forever.”¹ One “contradiction” he cited revolves around the father of Joseph.² Whereas Matthew 1:16 states that “**Jacob begot Joseph** the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ,” Luke 3:23 says, “Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of **Joseph, the son of Heli.**” How is it that Joseph could be the son of both Jacob and Heli? Is this a contradiction that Christian apologists prefer to keep under lock and key as McKinsey suggests? Not at all.

Admittedly, **on the surface**, the two statements may appear contradictory. However, there actually is a very simple explanation for the differences in the two verses: Matthew gives the genealogy of Jesus through Joseph, while Luke presents the genealogy of Jesus through His mother, Mary. Thus, Jacob is Joseph’s father (in Matthew 1:16), while Heli is Mary’s (in Luke 3:23).

But how can this be? Luke does not say that Mary is the offspring of Heli; rather, “Joseph” is “the son of Heli.” What logical, biblically sound explanation leads to the rational

conclusion that Luke 3 is the genealogy of Jesus through His mother, Mary? Consider the following seven points.

First, the two genealogies are totally different from the time of David to Jesus. It’s not merely that two different “grandfathers” of Jesus are listed—all the names given for the preceding **1,000 years** before Christ are **different** (except in the case of Zerubbabel and Shealtiel, where there likely was intermarriage among the two families, or else they were different people who wore the same names). Joseph descended from David’s son, Solomon (Matthew 1:6-7), while Mary descended from David’s son, Nathan (Luke 3:31).

Second, Matthew and Luke were writing to different audiences: Matthew to the Jews and Luke to the Greeks. From the beginning of Matthew’s Gospel account, he focused on Jesus’ connection to Abraham and David, from whom the Old Testament repeatedly prophesied that the Messiah would come. Luke, on the other hand, writing to a broader audience, took the genealogy of Jesus all the way back to Adam (the father of **all** mankind) and to God (the Creator of **all** mankind).

Third, though writing to a wider audience, Luke follows the Jewish tradition of only mentioning males in a line of descent. David Roper

noted: “Women might be mentioned incidentally (Mt. 1:3,5), but the lines of descent were through men.... [A]s a rule, Jews did not include women in genealogies.”³ What’s more, according to Adam Clarke, “whenever a family happened to end with a daughter, instead of naming her in the genealogy, they inserted her husband, as the son of him who was, in reality, but his father-in-law.”⁴ Thus, Luke gives a **fleshly** genealogy of the **virgin-born** Jesus (Luke 1:26-38; 2:1-7) through His mother, Mary, though designated by her husband’s name.

Fourth, the terms “son” and “daughter” are used in Scripture in a **wide variety** of ways. “Son” may mean (among other things) son by actual birth, grandson (Genesis 29:5; cf. 24:24,29), descendant (Matthew 1:1), step son (Matthew 13:55; Luke 4:22), as well as son-in-law (1 Samuel 18:27; cf. 24:16).⁵ Likewise, in addition to the ordinary usage of the word, Bible writers used the term “daughter” to designate daughter-in-law (Ruth 2:2), female descendant (Luke 1:5; 13:16), the women of a particular place taken collectively (Luke 23:28), women in general (Proverbs 31:29), etc.⁶ In short, **in different senses**, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus were all “of Heli.”

Fifth, **Matthew** tells of the coming and arrival of Jesus from **Joseph’s** perspective, while **Luke** writes from **Mary’s** point of view. Give serious attention to the following narratives of Matthew and Luke and consider how different their overall frame of references are:

- From **Matthew** (1:18-2:1a):
Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to **Joseph**, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then **Joseph** her **husband**, being a just **man**, and not wanting to make her a

public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while **he** thought about these things, behold, **an angel of the Lord appeared to him** in a dream, saying, "**Joseph, son of David**, do not be afraid to take to **you** Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us." Then **Joseph**, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded **him** and took to **him** his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And **he** called His name Jesus. Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king....

- From **Luke** (1:26-49,56; 2:7,17b-19):

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a **virgin** betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. **The virgin's name was Mary**. And having come in, **the angel said to her**, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with **you**; blessed are **you** among women!" But when **she** saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then **the angel said to her**, "Do not be afraid, **Mary**, for you have found favor with God. And behold, **you will conceive** in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will

be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." Then **Mary said** to the angel, "How can this be, since **I** do not know a man?" And **the angel answered and said to her**, "The Holy Spirit will come upon **you**, and the power of the Highest will overshadow **you**; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. Now indeed, Elizabeth **your** relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible." Then **Mary said**, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And **the angel departed from her**.

Now **Mary** arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. And

it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of **Mary**, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "**Blessed are you among women**, and blessed is the fruit of **your womb**! But why is this granted to me, that **the mother of my Lord** should come to me? For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. Blessed is **she** who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told **her** from the Lord."

And **Mary said**: "**My soul** magnifies the Lord, and **my spirit** has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His **maidservant**; for behold, henceforth all generations will call **me** blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for **me**, and holy is His name...." And **Mary** remained with her about three months, and returned to her house....

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Oct. 3	Montgomery, AL	(334) 264-2985
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And **she** [Mary] brought forth **her** firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths....

[T]hey [the shepherds] made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But **Mary** kept all these things and pondered them in **her** heart.

Given the Gospel writers' **stark differences** in perspectives of the accounts of the coming and arrival of Jesus—with Matthew's clear focus on Joseph and Luke's heavy attention on Mary—it was **perfectly natural** for Matthew to give the genealogy of Jesus through Joseph and Luke through Mary.

Sixth, the Greek article *ton* ("the") is **absent** before Joseph's name in Luke's genealogy of Christ. Yet, as Frederic Godet correctly highlighted, the word occurs before **every one** of the other names in the genealogy (e.g., the Heli, the Matthat...the Adam, the God).⁷ Godet also noted: "In the genealogy of Matthew, the article *ton*⁸ is put in the same way before each proper name, which clearly proves that it was the ordinary form in vogue in this kind of document."⁹ Thus, "[t]his want of the article [in Luke's genealogy—EL] **puts the name Joseph outside the genealogical series** properly so called, and assigns to it a **peculiar** position."¹⁰ Perhaps such peculiarity is a heavy hint of this genealogy being through Jesus' maternal grandfather (Heli), and not Joseph.

Finally, "If Luke were presenting Joseph's genealogy," Lenski logically argues, "it would according to his own statement be the genealogy only of the *supposed* father of Jesus, and of what value would such a genealogy be? No man could find a reference to the legal relation of Joseph to Jesus in *hos enomizeto*"¹¹

("as was supposed").¹² Furthermore, Roper suggests, "The phrase 'being, as supposed, the son of Joseph' should probably be thought of as parenthetical, with the words **son of Eli** [or Heli—EL] referring to Jesus, not Joseph."¹³ Thus, as A.T. Robertson concluded, "Jesus would... be **Heli's grandson**, an allowable meaning of 'son.'"¹⁴ In fact, not only should

[t]he parenthesis in our versions... be extended to include the name Joseph: "**(as was supposed of Joseph)**." To shorten it as is done in our versions makes the entire list up to "of God" (v. 38) dependent on "as was supposed," for there is no way to restrict this clause except by including "of Joseph" in it as a part of the parenthesis.¹⁵

The New Testament Greek manuscripts lack parentheses in Luke 3:23, just as they lack parentheses and all other sorts of punctuation throughout (which English Bible translators have added in attempts at greater clarity). Though "as was supposed" is undoubtedly a parenthetical expression, it makes better sense if such includes Joseph ["(as was supposed of Joseph)"]. Had this **fuller** expression been made parenthetical long ago, fewer individuals might have had difficulties seeing Mary's ancestry in Luke's genealogy of Christ.

In conclusion, it is perfectly logical to argue that Luke did not trace Jesus' **legal lineage** from Joseph back to David and Abraham (as did Matthew). Rather, he traced the **physical bloodline** of His virgin mother (not his stepfather) back to David, Abraham, and Adam. Such a logically possible explanation exonerates Luke and Matthew of any error in their penning of Jesus' genealogies.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Dennis McKinsey (1995), *The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus), p. 46.
- ² Ibid., p. 80.
- ³ David Roper (2003), *Truth for Today Commentary: The Life of Christ* (Searcy, AR: Resource Publications), 1:43.
- ⁴ Adam Clarke (1996), *Adam Clarke's Commentary* (Electronic Database: BibleSoft).
- ⁵ In fact, as Dave Miller explained, "[T]he Jews had no word to express this concept [of a son-in-law—EL] and so just used 'son'" [Dave Miller (2003), "The Genealogies of Matthew and Luke," <https://apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?article=932>].
- ⁶ See "Daughter" (1996), *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (Electronic Database: BibleSoft).
- ⁷ Frederic Godet (1881), *A Commentary on The Gospel of St. Luke* (New York: I.K. Funk), 1:128, www.google.com/books/edition/A_Commentary_on_the_Gospel_of_St_Luke/htQ2AAAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1.
- ⁸ "The Definite Article 'the' has various endings (e.g., *u* and *n*—EL), which show the function of the word it describes in the sentence" (see "Grammar: The Definite Article," in *Dr. Shirley's Greek Courses*, http://www.drshirley.org/greek/grammar/g_def-art.pdf).
- ⁹ Godet, 1:128.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., emp. added.
- ¹¹ R.C.H. Lenski (1961), *The Interpretation of the St. Luke's Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg), p. 219, emp. in orig.
- ¹² Joel Green noted in his commentary on Luke that "[o]ther appearances of the verb [*nomizo*—EL] 'to think' or 'to assume' [translated 'as was supposed' in Luke 3:23—EL] in Luke-Acts show that Luke has in mind **an assumption, wrongly made, that leads to persons acting as if it were true**" [Joel Green (1997), *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), p. 189, emp. added]. Though obviously **assumed** to be, Jesus was not Joseph's **biological** son.
- ¹³ Roper, 1:43, emp. in orig.
- ¹⁴ A.T. Robertson (1950), *A Harmony of the Gospels for Students of the Life of Christ* (New York: Harper & Row), p. 261, emp. added.
- ¹⁵ Lenski, p. 220, emp. added.



THE word “dinosaur” is an English word that was invented in the early 1840s to describe massive, extinct reptiles. It literally means “fearfully great” or “terribly great lizard.” According to the Bible, God created flying creatures on day five of the Creation week and land-living creatures on day six. In addition, God created humans on day six as well, placing the first humans and the huge flying and walking reptiles of the past together in the first week of Creation (Genesis 1). If humans have lived alongside these massive reptiles since the beginning of Creation until their extinction, then we would expect to find some type of evidence of their co-habitation.

One aspect of human behavior that spans virtually all human cultures past and present is the tendency to record facts for future generations about the natural world. When we look into the past, we find that almost every culture had stories about huge walking and flying reptiles. They were not called “dinosaurs,” of course, because the word was not invented. So, what did they call them? The word “dragon” was used frequently in the past to describe massive reptiles.¹

In modern times, the word dragon has assumed a mythical connotation. Most people bring to

mind fictional stories, such as *The Hobbit* or *The Game of Thrones*, and immediately assign the idea of huge flying reptiles that terrorized the ancient landscape to the realm of myth. As we uncover fossils from the past, however, we begin to understand that the stories of flying reptiles mesh perfectly with the biblical account of Creation.

In August of 2021, Jordan Mendoza wrote an article about the fossils of a huge flying reptile discovered in Australia. He began the article with this statement: “The iconic dragons from Game of Thrones may not be real, **but something similar to them existed** in Australia over 150 million years ago, according to new research.”² The researchers described a huge skull from a flying reptile known as a pterosaur. The creature’s skull measures approximately three feet long and was filled with 40 knife-like sharp teeth. Researchers named it *Thapunngaka shawi*, which means “Shaw’s spear mouth,” in recognition of the fossil’s discoverer, Len Shaw. The reptile’s estimated wingspan was over 21 feet. Tim Richards, the doctoral candidate that Mendoza quoted, said: “**It’s the closest thing we have to a real-life dragon.**”

Consider these facts. We know that ancient humans described flying reptiles as dragons. We know

that the Bible says all animals were made on days five and six of Creation. We know a creature that matches many descriptions of a flying dragon once lived in Australia. What conclusion should be drawn from these facts? Flying reptiles such as the *Thapunngaka shawi* did not live 150 million years ago,³ nor were they separated from humans by 65 million years, as is commonly taught. They were created on day five of Creation, and humans saw them and interacted with them. The multitude of dragon legends, though often embellished, represents exactly what we would expect from humans that saw a huge “spear mouth” or similar flying reptiles.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ For an extensive discussion on this topic, see Eric Lyons (2007), “Historical Support for the Coexistence of Dinosaurs and Humans,” *Reason & Revelation*, 27[9]:65-68,69-71, <https://www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=9&article=743>.
- ² Jordan Mendoza (2021), “Researchers Find the Closest Thing to a ‘Real-Life Dragon’ Lived Over 150 Million Years Ago in Australia,” , <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2021/08/11/fossils-pterosaur-australia-real-life-dragon/5568987001/>, emp. added.
- ³ Regarding the flawed assumptions upon which the dating methods are based, see Mike Houts (2015), “Assumptions and the Age of the Earth,” Apologetics Press, <https://apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?article=5126>.



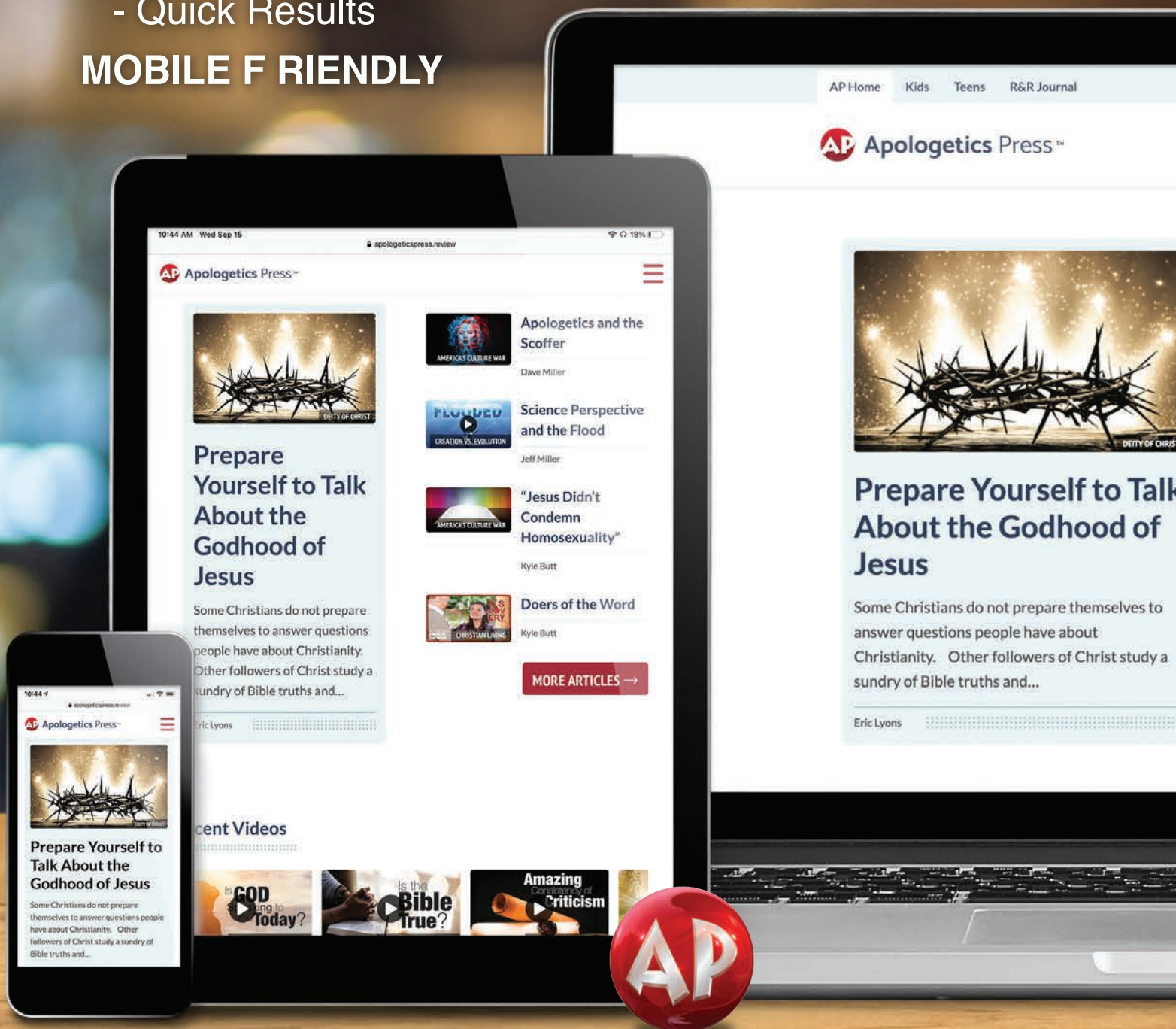
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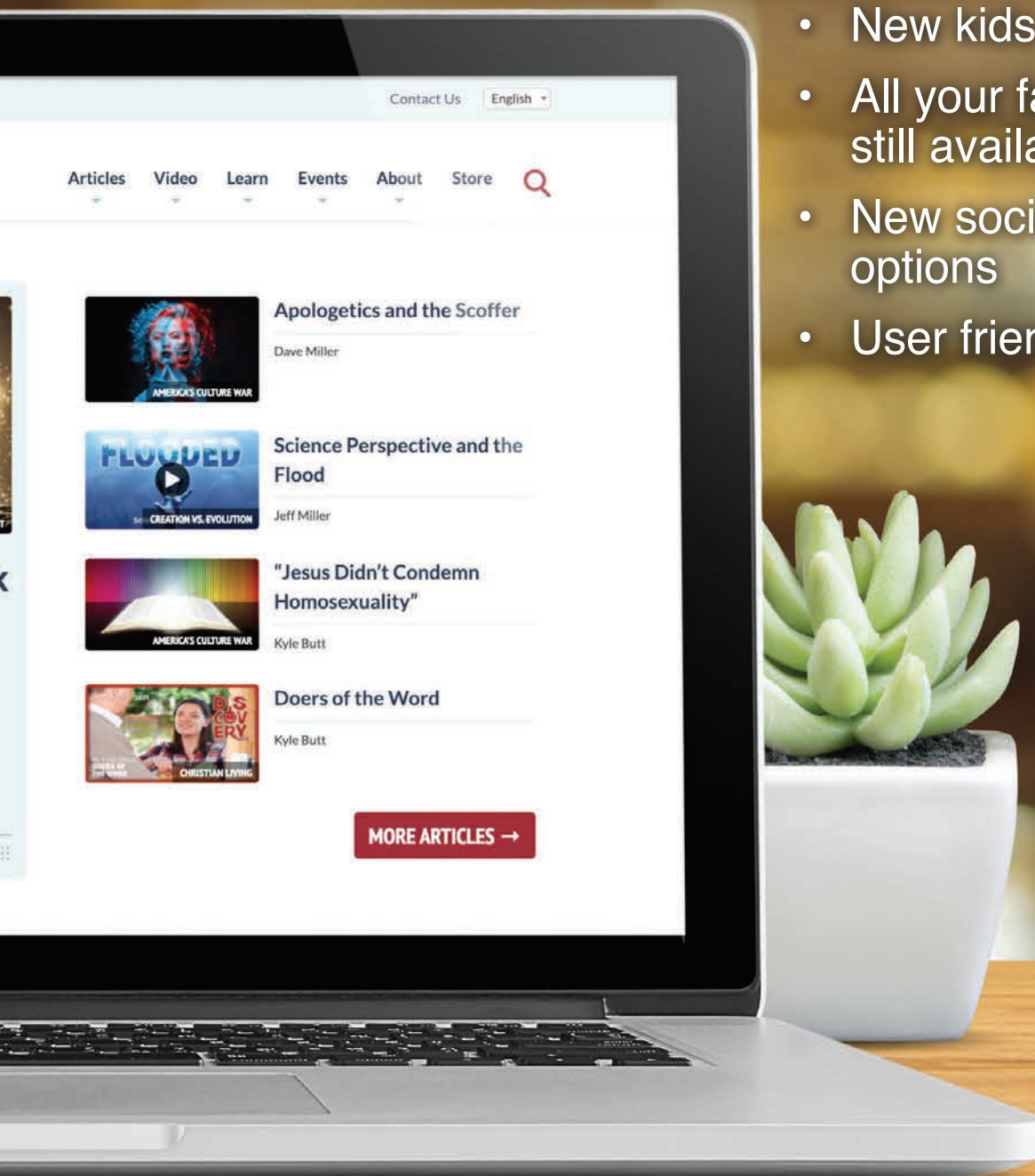
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Does the **Warfare & Violence** in the **Old Testament** Differ with the **Quran**?

Dave Miller, Ph.D.

Q: **THE** claim is often made by Muslims that the warfare, violence, and killing enjoined in the Quran are no different than the same enjoined in the Bible. Is this claim justified?

A: **BEFORE** turning to the Old Testament, observe that in His lifetime on Earth, Jesus clearly differed with Muhammad in His promotion of religion. Muslim scholar Mohammed Pickthall's own summary of Muhammad's war record is an eye-opener: "The number of the campaigns which he led in person during the last ten years of his life is twenty-seven, in nine of which there was hard fighting. The number of the expeditions which he planned and sent out under other leaders is thirty-eight."¹ What a contrast with Jesus Who never once took up the sword to inflict violence on others or encouraged anyone else to do so. The one time that one of His close followers took it upon himself to do so, the disciple was soundly reprimanded and ordered to put the sword away, with the added warning: "all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matthew 26:52).² Indeed, when Pilate quizzed Jesus regarding His intentions, He responded: "My kingdom is not of this world. If

My kingdom were of this world, **My servants would fight**, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36). Hence, so far as Christianity is concerned, the use of warfare and violence to advance its teaching is strictly forbidden. All those who have done so over the last 2,000 years (e.g., the Crusades) have acted in violation of New Testament teaching. And Muhammad, whose religion has been spread by such violence, is clearly acting contrary to Jesus' teachings.

But what about the warfare and violence affirmed and approved in the Old Testament? Consider several clear distinctions:

First, the Israelite conquest of the land of Canaan was a specific, unique moment in history that was brought on by the depravity of the Palestinian peoples at the time. Deuteronomy 7 makes clear that the reason for their destruction was their idolatry and wickedness. **God did not order the Israelites to kill people for failing to convert to Judaism.** He ordered them to eliminate the Palestinian population due to the fact that they were extremely degraded morally and spiritually irretrievable—a final condition that **only God**, not mere humans, can assess. Their iniquity

had become "full" (Genesis 15:16) and they needed to be destroyed—just like the pre-Flood population (Genesis 6:5). But God has never issued an ongoing, longstanding order to conquer the world and kill all sinners or all those who disagree with Bible religion. Islam, on the other hand, seeks to subjugate the entire world (*Surah* 2:190-193).

Second, this side of the Cross, the God of the Bible wants the entire world to have access to the Gospel without being coerced or threatened with death. Hence, the central directive and standing order of Christianity consists of "evangelizing" the whole world. The Greek word "evangelize" means to "*bring or announce good news...Proclaim, preach (the gospel)*."³ While Islam seeks to coerce everyone to embrace Islam, in fact, God wants the Gospel spread throughout the world **until Jesus returns** (Matthew 28:20). So it would be completely counter-productive for God to enjoin extermination of people for not accepting Christ during the period of time of one's earthly sojourn. The day of reckoning will occur at the Judgment. **Islam, by definition, seeks to implement Judgment Day right now**—in time, in history—literally circumventing God's own timetable.



God commands the preaching of the Gospel (Mark 16:15-16) which is intended to **inform** and **warn** people about what lies ahead after death and departure from this life.

Third, God does not want human beings to be **forced** to obey Him. They must be allowed to exercise their own volition while in this life—it's their choice. Islam presumes to take it upon itself to pass final judgment prematurely, rather than allowing everyone to make their own choices as long as they are alive, and then face the eternal consequences of their choices **after** death—not before (Hebrews 9:27). Even on the Day of Judgment, God will not force people to submit to Him. They were given that opportunity in life. At the Judgment, He will simply consign them to the location of **their** choice based on how they chose to live. Again, Islam interferes with God's will. Islam is, in fact, at odds with and counterproductive to His intentions regarding the purpose of human existence on Earth. Indeed, Islam seeks to frustrate and thwart the plan of God in which life on Earth is intended to be a probationary period in which each human being is given the opportunity to exercise his free will regarding God's will.⁴ What's more, the central reason why such a mandate to subjugate the world is incorrect is because **the God of the Bible would not issue such a mandate**. It would conflict with His will that humans freely choose. In this regard, Islam is in direct opposition to the very nature of Deity and the image of Himself that He placed within each person (Genesis 1:27). All humans **must** be permitted to make that choice without coercion. The attribute of free will was created within humans by God and He wants each person to decide for himself where he will spend eternity.

Fourth, we must understand that Israel was a theocracy, i.e., civil government was combined with the direct religious rule of God. If God were so conducting Himself today, He might issue orders to a specific country regarding the elimination of various people who behave in a morally deplorable manner—but He is not so conducting Himself. This side of the Cross, He directs the Church (the only receptacle of

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people for failing to
convert to Judaism.*

the saved on Earth) to focus her efforts on **evangelism**. On the other hand, He enjoins upon civil government in **all** countries the responsibility to “bear the sword” (Romans 13:4)—as punishment for those who violate the civil laws of the land. Islam has confounded God's approach by fusing religion and state. While God desires that all people on Earth permit Chris-

tian principles to permeate their lives—which would naturally and inevitably bring Christian influence to governmental institutions—nevertheless, He does not want Christianity imposed onto a government forcibly. The Founders of America well understood this principle. The majority passionately desired that the bulk of the population remain committed to the one true God (i.e., the God of the Bible) and that Christian principles permeate the Republic, but they also fiercely protected each individual's right to choose and practice one's own understanding of religion.

The true practice of Islam and implementation of the Quran's directives would inevitably result in the destruction of the *U.S. Constitution* and the liberties that Americans have historically enjoyed. The Founding Fathers not only recognized such an outcome, they declared forthrightly the threat of non-Christian religion to the stability and perpetuation of the Republic in contrast with the inherent congruency of Christianity with the political principles they sought to establish.⁵ Indeed, in his “Farewell

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Address,” the father of our country insisted:

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, **religion and morality** are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens. The mere politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connections with private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked: Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice? And let us with caution indulge the **supposition that morality can be maintained without religion**. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, **reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle**. It is substantially true that **virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government**. The rule, indeed, extends with more or less force to

every species of free government. Who that is a sincere friend to it can look with indifference upon attempts to shake the foundation of the fabric?⁶

Finally, it is important to recognize that the evidence demonstrates that the Quran does not possess the attributes of inspiration, but rather, shows itself to be of human origin.⁷ Consequently, its mandate to conquer the world is of human origin. On the other hand, the Bible can be proven, by abundant evidence, to be the inspired Word of God.⁸ It clearly teaches that God has given no mandate this side of the Cross for His people to engage in physical force to advance Christianity.⁹

ENDNOTES

- 1 Mohammed Pickthall (no date), *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* (New York: Mentor), p. xxvi.
- 2 For an analysis of this verse, see Dave Miller (2017), *God & Government* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press), p. 34.
- 3 F. Wilbur Gingrich (1965), *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press), p. 85, italics in orig.
- 4 See Thomas B. Warren (1972), *Have Atheists Proved There Is No God?* (Ramer, TN: National Christian Press). Also Dave Miller (2015),

Why People Suffer (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press).

- 5 See, for example, Dave Miller (2008), *The Silencing of God* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press); Dave Miller (2010), *Christ & the Continental Congress* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press); Dave Miller (2013), “Were the Founding Fathers ‘Tolerant’ of Islam? [Parts I&II],” *Reason & Revelation*, <https://apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=7&article=4622&topic=44>.
- 6 George Washington (1796), *Address of George Washington, President of the United States...Preparatory to His Declination* (Baltimore, MD: George & Henry Keating), pp. 22-23, emp. added.
- 7 See Chapters 3-6 in Dave Miller (2005), *The Quran Unveiled* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press), pp. 51-150.
- 8 See, for example, Kyle Butt (2007), *Behold! The Word of God* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press). Also Dave Miller (2020), *The Bible is from God: A Sampling of Proofs* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press).
- 9 For further reading, see Robert Spencer (2007), *Religion of Peace? Why Christianity Is and Islam Isn't* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing).

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Roman Jailer's Attempted Suicide

Dave Miller, Ph.D.



which meant the jailer would have faced the same punishment that was to be inflicted on the escaped prisoner.² Rather than face disgrace and a painful execution, the jailer decided to end his own life. The Roman code of honor necessitated it.³ Due to Paul's diligence and love for lost souls, praise be to God that this suicidal pagan became a Christian.

ENDNOTES

¹ The Greek has *strategoi*, which is the term Greek historians used to refer to the Roman political and/or military office of praetor—another proof of Luke's historical accuracy.

² See Frederick Sawyer (1882), "Roman Law as Illustrated in the New Testament," in *The Sunday at Home Family Magazine* (London: Religious Tract Society), 29[1490]:726, November 18; Alford, 2:183; W.J. Conybeare and J.S. Howson (1893), *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co.), pp. 236-237; R.J. Knowling (no date), *The Expositor's Greek Testament: The Acts of the Apostles*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 2:351; William Ramsay (1897), *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1962 reprint), p. 222; p. 1701; Matthew Henry (1828), *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament* (London: Joseph Ogle Robinson), 3:839; Carl Ludwig von Bar (1916), *A History of Continental Criminal Law*, trans. Thomas Bell (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, & Co.), p. 47; Freeman, "Responsibility of Jailers," p. 446; R.C.H. Lenski (1961), *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg), p. 676.

³ J.W. McGarvey (1892), *New Commentary on Acts of Apostles* (Cincinnati, OH: Standard), 2:101.

THE historicity of the contents of the Bible, and the Bible's uncanny accuracy in its handling of people and circumstances long since faded into the annals of ancient history, are powerful demonstrations of its supernatural origins. Take, for example, the occasion when Paul and Silas were imprisoned in the Roman town of Philippi (Acts 16). At about midnight, as they were singing hymns to God, an earthquake—Luke says it was a "great" one—literally shook the foundations of the prison, causing all the doors to open and the manacles on the prisoners to release. Roused from his sleep, the jailer saw that the prison doors had been jarred open, causing him to fear that the prisoners had, in fact, escaped. Consequently, he "drew his sword and was about to kill himself" (Acts 16:27). Why? True, allowing prisoners to escape is bad, but why would it merit committing suicide?

The historical evidence indicates that Roman jailers were required to take personal responsibility for the prisoners committed to them. This fact is reflected in the text where we are told that the "magistrates"¹ of

the city "command[ed] the jailer to keep them securely. Having received **such a charge**, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks" (Acts 16:23-24). This "charge" was serious business. Negligence in this matter meant inevitable death—perhaps even by slow, painful torture.

No doubt influenced by Roman protocol along this line, when Peter escaped from custody, King Herod "examined the guards and commanded that they should be put to death" (Acts 12:19). Likewise, when Paul was being taken to Rome along with many other prisoners, hurricane force wind eventually drove the ship aground. Amid the turbulence, the Roman soldiers, who were charged with the custody of the prisoners, had formed a plan: "And the soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape" (Acts 27:42). It was only because Paul had befriended the centurion that the intention of the soldiers was thwarted.

Such instances illustrate Roman law pertaining to "the custody of criminals" (*de custodia reorum*),



NOTE FROM

The Editor

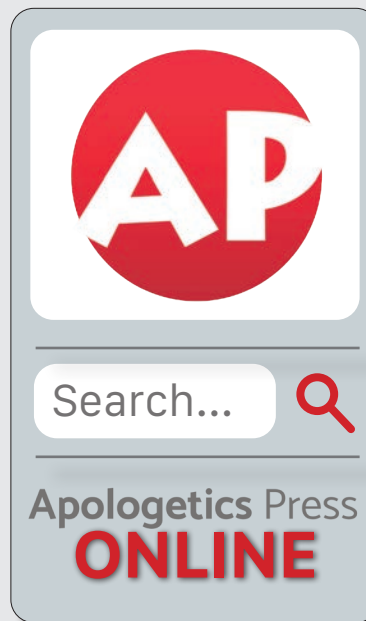


The New AP Website

Some 10 years ago, AP launched a new state-of-the-art website that we hoped would provide effective service to the wide range of internet users that desired to access apologetics materials. We are very grateful that the website has served this purpose, impacting hundreds of thousands of people over the last decade.

But, of course, our fast-paced world is constantly upgrading the variety of electronic tools that come on the scene and provide an enhanced experience for those seeking information. We at AP have been working for some time on providing a complete overhaul of our website. Our goal is to provide features that will increase our effectiveness in impacting the public with God's thinking.

We are delighted to announce that we have just launched our new website. We have particularly sought to create a **search engine** that will enable visitors to our site to find the material and answers that they desire with as little difficulty as possible. We have added new filter functionality



that promises to provide quicker, better results. The new look of the site is modern, yet characterized by simplicity, with improved navigation capability. Our old Spanish website has been integrated into this new site, together with the materials provided in the other languages that we offer. We still have a video section which is better organized and will provide ease of access. We have included archives for past issues of our two monthly magazines. And we have added a new kids and teens section that includes content with them in mind.

You will have to visit our site in order to explore its features and see for yourself the extent to which, with God's help, we have been successful in upgrading and improving the AP website.

Dave Miller

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for More Details**